

Edwards Remarks at Dedication of Earl Rudder High School

Superintendent Cargill and Principal Piatt, thank you for giving me the privilege of being here, because the Rudder family has had a very personal impact on my life. Mrs. Earl Rudder was like a second mother to me, although in fairness, I should point out that she effectively adopted thousands of Aggies over several generations. That did not make her any less special to me, and I want to thank Ann, Linda, Bud and Bob for sharing for so many years your mother and father with all of us in your extended Aggie family.

I never met General Rudder, because he died just months before I enrolled at A&M in 1970, but like every American and every citizen of the world who benefited from the defeat of NAZI forces in World War II, I am the beneficiary of his indomitable courage on D-Day, which marked the beginning of the end for Hitler's plan of world domination.

In a more personal way, I paid for my graduate school education with the scholarship I received when I was awarded the Earl Rudder Award upon my graduation from A&M in 1974. Nevertheless, receiving that award has always been a source of deep humility to me, because I know that I could not even walk in the shadows of this great American's shoes.

I want to salute the school board members, Superintendent Cargill and all who made this day and this new school possible. James Earl Rudder High School is far more than brick, glass and mortar, because a school represents the very best of our values as a community. This school represents the commitment of one generation to the next. It represents this community's willingness to tax itself to ensure that its children have a fair chance to reach their highest God-given potential.

It is in our schools and houses of worship that we witness our best sense of community, a sense that we truly are our brothers' keepers. It is in our schools that we Americans strive to provide for equality of opportunity for all. Ours is an imperfect, never ending journey, but in that march toward equality for all, we show our greatness and goodness as a nation. Thomas Jefferson was the 33-year-old author of our Declaration of Independence. He was our third and one of our greatest Presidents. Yet, before he died, he made it clear that he wanted it etched on his gravestone that he was the founder of a University. In his wisdom, Thomas Jefferson understood the importance of education to our democracy.

Two centuries later, I believe that each of you who played a role in founding James Earl Rudder High School shares the right to be proud of your accomplishment. It is my hope that the life and values of Earl Rudder will be an inspiration to every student here from this day forward. We should never forget the story of Earl Rudder, because his is the story of the American spirit. It is a story from which we can all learn.

Born in the small town of Eden, Texas, he did not inherit material wealth, but his family, faith and education helped mold a true leader. Like so many Americans, he dedicated his life to

helping others, to serving his country.

After graduating from Texas A&M in 1932, Earl Rudder was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserves. He then chose the noble profession of teaching—first as a coach and teacher at Brady High School and later at Tarleton State College. In 1941 his country called him to duty, and did he ever answer that call. Rising through the ranks because of his integrity, courage and leadership skills, he was chosen to lead the 2nd Ranger Battalion by one of the most respected Generals to ever serve in the U.S. Army, General Omar Bradley.

His D-Day mission was to lead the best of the best up the 100 foot cliffs of Pointe du Hoc to disarm massive German guns that could have killed thousands of American G.I.s and put the Allied invasion of France at risk.

General Bradley said this about the responsibility given then Lt. Colonel Earl Rudder, “No soldier in my command has ever been wished a more difficult task than that which befell the thirty-four-year-old Commander of this Provisional Ranger Force.” 225 Rangers began their mission on that perilous day when literally the fate of the world was in their hands. Only 99 survived, but because of the heroism of Earl Rudder and Rudder’s Rangers that day, our world survived the tyranny of Adolf Hitler. Lt. Colonel Rudder, this great Aggie and American, didn’t stop there. He went on to lead a unit in the Battle of the Bulge and became one of the most decorated veterans of World War II.

Having every right to say his public service was completed at the end of World War II, Earl Rudder did what so many of America’s veterans have done throughout our history. He spent the rest of his life in service to others and to the country he loved. He moved back to Brady, Texas and became its mayor. He was elected Land Commissioner of Texas, a position he used to clean up abuses in veterans’ land programs.

When he became the President of Texas A&M University, his beloved alma mater, Earl Rudder told his close classmate of ‘32 and my mentor, Congressman Olin E. Teague, that he had to make a decision that in some ways brought more heat on him than German guns at Pointe du Hoc. He decided to allow women into A&M and to make the Corps of Cadets voluntary for A&M students.

Some Aggies didn’t talk to President Rudder ever again. But, just as he did on D-Day, Earl Rudder showed the courage of his conviction. Just as D-Day literally helped save the world as we know it, President Rudder’s decision in the 1960’s saved the future of Texas A&M. It was, perhaps, the most important decision ever made by any President of Texas A&M, and I am not sure if any other person but Earl Rudder could have made it. In 1967, President Lyndon Johnson presented Earl Rudder with the Distinguished Service Medal, our nation’s highest civilian award.

Love of faith, family and country; courage under fire; integrity; and lifelong service to others—these were the values of Earl Rudder. They are the quintessential American values that have made ours the greatest nation in the world.

My hope is that the story and values of Earl Rudder will inspire the lives of everyone who walks through these doors for generations to come. If so, then ours will be a better community and a better country, and we will have truly honored the service of this American hero.

May God bless James Earl Rudder High School and all who will serve here.